

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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O R 281957Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8860

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 4879

E O 11652 GDS

TAGS PINT MORG CO

SUBJ: PRES LOPEZ REMOVES ARMY COMDR

REF BOGOTA 4494

1. IN A SURPRISE AND HIGHLY DRAMATIC MOVE PRES LOPEZ IN EFFECT FIRED GEN VALENCIA TOVAR EARLY THIS MORNING AS COMDR OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMY. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, LOPEZ CONFERRED WITH DEFMIN VARON VALENCIA AND OTHER MOD OFFICIALS IN A MEETING AT THE PRES'S PALACE THAT BEGAN WED AFTERNOON. VALENCIA TOVAR WAS SUMMONED, ARRIVED AT ABOUT 11:30 PM AND DEPARTED AT 1:30 AM WHEN HE RESPONDED NON-COMMITTALLY TO REPORTERS' QUESTIONS. THE OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE ANNOUNCING HIS REMOVAL WAS RELEASED A FEW MOMENTS LATER.

2. THIS SEQUENCE OF EVENTS FOLLOWED THE PUBLICATION THE PREVIOUS DAY IN BOGOTA'S EL ESPECTADOR OF A UPI STORY DESCRIBING HOW LOPEZ HAD OVERCOME AN ATTEMPTED COUP IN EARLY MAY. THE UPI STORY IN TURN PROVOKED SEPARATE STATEMENTS OF DENIAL OF ANY COUP ATTEMPT BY THE DEFMIN AND BY VALENCIA TOVAR. THE STORY PROBABLY ALSO PROVOKED CONSIDERABLE IRRITATION ON THE PART OF LOPEZ OVER THE PUBLICATION ABROAD OF A STORY WHICH QUESTIONED THE STABILITY OF HIS REGIME.

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3. THERE IS NO READY EXPLANATION FOR THE TIMING AND MANNER OF

LOPEZ'S REMOVAL OF VALENCIA, WHICH BECAUSE OF ITS PRECIPITATENESS SUGGESTS THAT LOPEZ MAY HAVE BEEN RESPONDING TO AN IMMEDIATE THREAT, EITHER REAL OR FANCIED. THERE IS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE NO EVIDENCE THAT THERE WAS SUCH AN IMMINENT THREAT TO LOPEZ'S GOVT.

4. PERHAPS SOME OF THE EXPLANATION RESTS ON TWO FACTORS: (1) INTERNAL FEUDING BETWEEN THE VARON VALENCIA AND VALENCIA TOVAR FACTIONS OF THE ARMY AND (2) LOPEZ'S HOT TEMPER WHICH HE SOMETIMES USES IN A CONTROLLED WAY. THIS SCENARIO WOULD HAVE VARON VALENCIA FILLING LOPEZ'S EAR WITH COMPLAINTS ABOUT VALENCIA TOVAR AND LOPEZ IN ANGER, AT LEAST IN PART INDUCED BY THE UPI STORY, DECIDING TO SACK VALENCIA. WHETHER THIS INVOLVED ANY ALLEGATION OR BELIEF THAT VALENCIA OR HIS FOLLOWERS WERE SOMEHOW DISLOYAL TO LOPEZ, DISGRUNTLED AT RECENT CHANGES OR EVEN PLOTTING IS SIMPLY NOT CLEAR AT THE MOMENT.

5. THE MYSTERIOUS SERIES OF CHANGES IN MIL COMMANDS RECENTLY HAS PRODUCED CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION AND SOME CONCERN AMONG INFORMED PUBLIC OPINION. THERE IS ALSO UNDOUBTEDLY TENSION AND UNHAPPINESS IN THE OFFICER CORPS OVER VALENCIA'S REMOVAL DUE TO HIS POPULARITY. IT WOULD APPEAR LIKELY THAT THE PRES IS ALSO FEELING CONSIDERABLE RESENTMENT AGAINST VARON FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO MANAGE INTERNAL PROBLEMS IN THE MIL WITH DISCRETION AND WITHOUT THE PRES HAVING TO INVOLVE HIMSELF. SOME SOURCES BELIEVE THAT VARON IS NOW A PRIME CANDIDATE FOR REMOVAL DURING THE NEXT CABINET SHAKEUP. VAKY

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